

The Secretary of Energy

Washington, DC 20585

September 16, 1996

The Honorable John T. Conway
Chairman, Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D. C. 20004

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your August 14, 1996, letter transmitting the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board's Recommendation 96-1. The Department accepts Recommendation 96-1.

Safe operation of the In-Tank Precipitation System is vital to the success of the entire high-level waste system at the Savannah River Site, and an adequate understanding of benzene generation and release is necessary for safe operation. We appreciate your offer to allocate priority resources to join in the expedited development of a mutually acceptable Implementation Plan, and we look forward to your assistance in this matter.

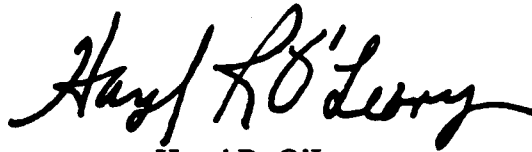
The Savannah River Operations Office has directed that necessary modifications are completed and approval of a revised safety basis be obtained prior to resuming process operations of the In-Tank Precipitation System. Discussions between the Board, Board staff members, and Savannah River personnel on August 28, 1996, were beneficial in clarifying expectations for:

- the identification of catalysts that contribute to benzene generation in the facility;
- investigation of the chemical and physical mechanisms that could influence the retention or release of benzene in the waste slurry;
- adequacy of safety measures, including the Authorization Basis, for in-plant testing and full operation of the system; and
- laboratory testing to improve the understanding of the tetraphenylborate chemistry in the waste slurries.

As stated in the Recommendation, the Department and Westinghouse Savannah River Company have brought substantial expertise to bear on understanding the science of the In-Tank Precipitation System process, and we will continue to do so as we work to ensure a successful resolution of this Recommendation.

Given the site-specific nature of the Recommendation, I have designated Mr. Lee Watkins, the Assistant Manager for High Level Waste, Savannah River Operations Office, as the responsible manager for the preparation of the Implementation Plan. Mr. Watkins can be reached on (803) 208-6053.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hazel R. O'Leary". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Hazel" and last name "O'Leary" being more prominent than the middle initial "R".

Hazel R. O'Leary